

Headline: 50 Companies We Can't Do Without
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Fifty companies we can't do without? Of course there are more than 50 private companies the corridor can't do without. We could fill 10 issues of 10/12 writing about hundreds of locally owned, privately held businesses that are crucial to the life and economy of the region. Instead, what we hoped to accomplish with this list was a unique way of representing within the covers of a single issue what the corridor, both economically and culturally, has been in the past and might be in the future. And—as always—a way of helping leaders in each part of the corridor understand the entire corridor.

It's easy to think of businesses that provide thousands of jobs as "companies we can't do without"—and they usually are. But we wanted this list to be about more than just large employers or economic driver firms, so we also looked for businesses that are 1) important because of their national or global footprint, 2) notable for innovation, 3) good corporate citizens, or 4) critical to key industries, be they the bedrock industries we depend on today or the high-growth industries we hope to build in the future. There are companies we can't do without because they have become ambassadors through which the world knows the corridor, by completing projects and distributing their brands around the world. Others are fundamental to how the corridor knows itself, creating the brands we love and the culture we share. And of course, some businesses stand out in several of these areas.

To create the list, we started by asking for nominations from chambers and economic development organizations up and down the corridor and from Louisiana Economic Development and its network of regional contacts. After extensive research and discussion, our editorial board narrowed the nominations to a final list of 50. (We did not include banks, law firms, insurance companies or media outlets—though each of these sectors certainly plays an important role in corridor communities.) Finally, we asked each company on the list to respond to a survey. The information presented here is compiled from their responses and 10/12's research.

1 Abita Brewery

Abita touts itself as the oldest and largest craft brewer in the Southeast, and they've attained success while craftily incorporating homegrown ingredients like Louisiana strawberries, satsumas and cane sugar in their product lines. Aside from its status as a south Louisiana cultural icon (Gambit readers have voted it the No. 1 beer brand for eight years in a row), Abita beer is now distributed across the country. The company has also made a point of being a good corporate neighbor, not only to its hometown of Abita Springs, but to all of south Louisiana. It has raised \$550,000 for hurricane relief charities through its Restoration Ale project, and this year it will donate more beer and root beer to various charities and fundraising events than it brewed in its first year of business.

At a glance

What they do: Brewer of craft beers and root beer

Company headquarters: Abita Springs

Top executive: David Blossman

Total employees: 58

Total employees in Louisiana: 51

Year founded: 1986

Market area: Nationwide

Web: abita.com

2 Acadian Ambulance

Acadian Ambulance has ground and air ambulance facilities strategically located in areas across Louisiana, Texas and Mississippi, medics supporting offshore facilities across the Gulf, and monitoring services that are available across the country. In addition to its role in emergency medical transportation, the company has played a key role in marshaling technology, resources and a partnership with South Louisiana Community College to train new and existing medics through its National EMS Academy, a program that now reaches statewide. More recently, Acadian has diversified into innovative business services such as monitored security solutions, chartered air travel and GPS fleet monitoring.

At a glance

What they do: Nation's largest private ambulance service provider

Company headquarters: Lafayette

Top executive: Richard Zuschlag

Total employees: 3,000

Total employees in Louisiana: 2,500

Year founded: 1971

Market area: South Louisiana, south Texas, eastern Mississippi

Web: acadian.com

3 Acme Truck Line, Inc.

Acme was founded in 1960 as a Louisiana intrastate oilfield hauler. At that time the company consisted of six trucks, two small sheds in Harvey and three office employees. From these humble beginnings, it has grown into a recognized industry leader with more than 120 offices, 2,000 trucks and 7,000 customers throughout the U.S. and Canada. A savvy business strategy of exclusively using owner/operators and maintaining numerous local offices for flexibility and 24/7 customer service has led to decades of continuous expansion and positioned Acme for aggressive national sales efforts.

At a glance

What they do: Trucking company specializing in flatbed expedited transportation of oilfield and general commodities freight

Company headquarters: Harvey

Top executive: Mike Coatney

Total employees: 2,100

Total employees in Louisiana: 1,010

Year founded: 1960

Market area: Primarily the Gulf South

Web: acmetruck.com

4 Aeroframe

For a glimpse of one of the 10/12 corridor's most successful businesses, just look toward the sky.

There you will see planes from around the world flying to and from Aeroframe Services, a Lake Charles-based company that specializes in the maintenance, repair and overhaul (known as MRO in the aviation industry) of large commercial transport aircraft. Located at Chennault International Airport in Lake Charles, Aeroframe has a customer base that includes both cargo and passenger planes, from Federal Express to US Airways.

In summer 2005, Roger Porter acquired the company from EADS, the Europe-based owner of Airbus that, along with Northrop Grumman, established Aeroframe in 2000. Porter, who has spent his entire life in the aviation business, wanted to maintain the company's niche in the aviation MRO industry. Aeroframe specializes in heavy maintenance and modifications of Airbus airframes. Today, the company is the largest Airbus service provider in North America.

The majority of Aeroframe's work involves scheduled maintenance required by the Federal Aviation Administration. Just like a car needs regular upkeep, an airplane needs scheduled maintenance checks as well. The average life cycle of an aircraft ranges from 20 years to 40 years, and a plane must undergo routine inspections mandated by the FAA every 12 months to 18 months. Some of the MRO services provided by Aeroframe include landing gear changes, engine removal or replacement, flight control changes and rigging, panel replacement and fuel leak repair. In addition to MRO services, Aeroframe also performs avionics upgrades, interior refurbishment, cabin conversion, and paint and strip services.

Aeroframe's facilities at Chennault include 75,000 square feet of hangar space with 12 wide-body bays. A 30,000-square-foot climate-controlled warehouse is operated around the clock. During a typical year, Aeroframe services approximately 75 planes; each service is known as an "event." The work is incredibly labor intensive—it takes 75 to 100 workers to service each aircraft. The same team works nose to tail—or, in other words, from start to finish throughout the plane's entire maintenance and repair event. Each event takes about 30-35 days and requires about 20,000 man hours. In 2009, Aeroframe employees completed 350,000 man hours.

Lake Charles Mayor Randy Roach says the intricate, technical work Aeroframe does at its Chennault facility is impressive.

"When you walk into the hangar and see an airplane all in pieces, then just a few weeks later you see that same plane taking off from Chennault, it's pretty amazing," Roach says. "It's hard to appreciate the complexity of the work without seeing it first-hand."

The aviation MRO industry is an incredibly global one, with airlines, freight companies, governments and private companies flying their planes to facilities around the world for service. "We are competing on a global scale in a very labor-intensive business," Porter says. "We're constantly looking at how we can improve our efficiency." This intense competition recently led Porter and his staff to change how Aeroframe compensates its maintenance staff. Instead of getting paid at an hourly rate, maintenance personnel now are compensated at a piece rate. Staff are paid a set rate for each maintenance event, regardless of how long it takes them to complete the event.

"Changing to a piece rate allowed the mechanics to control their own destiny," Porter says. "It incentivizes the mechanic to be more efficient."

Aeroframe's presence in the corridor is not just visible in the skies or at Chennault. The company, which has annual revenue of about \$60 million, has an evident impact on the corridor's economic vitality. Aeroframe is a major private-sector employer in the region—and one that is growing. In February, Porter, along with Gov. Bobby Jindal and Mayor Roach, announced Aeroframe's plans to add at least 300 new jobs this year, bringing the total to about 600 employees by the end of the year.

Employees earn an average salary of \$58,000 per year, plus benefits, and Porter estimates that the company's year-end payroll will reach about \$34 million. Aeroframe also uses many local businesses in its operations. For example, the company turns to local interior shops for sewing needs and helps these local businesses obtain the needed FAA certifications. Aeroframe partners with the community in other ways, as well. For example, the company works with SOWELA Technical Community College's Aviation Technology Maintenance program to prepare students for FAA certification in airframe and powerplant mechanics, which is required for many positions at Aeroframe. "We want to grow as much local talent as possible," Porter says. —Story by Meredith Whitten

At a glance

What they do: Aviation maintenance, repair & overhaul facility; largest MRO in North America

Company headquarters: Lake Charles

Top executive: Roger Porter

Total employees: 400

Total employees in Louisiana: 400

Year founded: 2000

Market area: Worldwide

Web: aeroframe.com

5 Associated Grocers

While its core idea of providing combined buying power to member-retailers is critical to the continued competitiveness of independent retail grocers, this company today provides a much broader range of support to its 220-plus members: retail accounting, advertising, engineering, marketing, retail technology and merchandising. With 2008 annual sales of \$700 million, Associated Grocers is No. 4 on the Greater Baton Rouge Business Report's Top 100 list and a key player in the economy of the corridor.

At a glance

What they do: Wholesale grocery distribution for independent grocers

Company headquarters: Baton Rouge

Top executive: J.H. Campbell Jr.

Total employees: 710

Total employees in Louisiana: 705

Year founded: 1950

Market area: Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas

Web: agbr.com

6 Barrister Global Services Network

With more than 30 years experience in the IT support services industry, Barrister is now the largest woman-owned, HUBZone-located computer services organization in the U.S., and its solid growth path is indicated by its appearance on the Inc. 500 list of fastest growing private companies for both 2008 and 2009. It provides technology response services for a variety of industries and multiple major companies in the U.S. (hardware and software), including technology manufacturers and all levels of federal, state and local government, using a network of 15,000 technicians across the country.

At a glance

What they do: Provide national and international support for computers, laptops and servers, as well as multi-tier support on printers

Company headquarters: Hammond

Top executives: Debra D. Bowers, John S. Bowers III, Jared M. Bowers

Total employees: 164

Total employees in Louisiana: 160

Year founded: 1972

Market area: Nationwide

Web: barrister.com

7 Bercen, Inc.

Bercen moved its headquarters and R&D labs from Rhode Island to Livingston Parish in 2009, a critical relocation "win" for economic development on the corridor. The company is a leader in providing both innovation and services to the paper industry and employs both engineers and other staff with higher-than-average salaries. Key assets the company identified in announcing the move: being able to recruit research chemists and engineers from LSU and Southeastern Louisiana University, and proximity to raw materials, the petrochemical industry and the Port of New Orleans.

At a glance

What they do: Manufacture specialty chemicals for the pulp and paper industry

Company headquarters: Denham Springs

Top executive: Jim Thorpe

Total employees: 55

Total employees in Louisiana: 46

Year founded: 1958

Market area: Worldwide

Web: bercen.com

8 Bevolo Gas & Electric Lights

Bevolo is a name known throughout the United States and in 28 countries as a leader in traditional and custom lighting, but it is the way it symbolizes the architecture and ambience of a city known for its architecture and ambience that captured our attention. Bevolo's signature French Quarter light has spread this ambience around the world and has become a trademark of New Orleans, adorning many restaurants, hotels and landmarks in the city. The design of the French Quarter light was based on a drawing by none other than A. Hays Town, the patron saint of corridor architecture. Though it now produces lights in Covington and Harvey as well, Bevolo still makes lights in the French Quarter, as it has for the last 65 years. The story of Bevolo Gas & Electric Lights is infused with the history of lighting, the French Quarter and Louisiana architecture. Watch the story on video [here](#).

At a glance

What they do: Manufacture hand-made copper lights

Company headquarters: New Orleans

Top executive: Drew Bevolo

Total employees: 50

Total employees in Louisiana: 50

Year founded: 1945

Market area: International

Web: bevolo.com

9 Billes Partners

As a participating architect for Brad Pitt's Make It Right foundation, Billes is playing a key role in the rebuilding of New Orleans under the guidelines of sustainability. Make It Right is not only devoted to rebuilding homes in the hurricane-devastated Ninth Ward, it functions as a unique laboratory for testing and implementing new construction techniques, technologies and materials that will make affordable, green, storm-resistant homes for Gulf Coast residents. As of February 2010, three different home designs Billes contributed to the project had been built, all of which have earned a LEED Platinum certification. Billes is also the design firm behind the Superdome repairs, renovations at New Orleans' iconic French Market and renovations to the Ninth Ward's historic William Frantz Elementary School, where the plan includes a solar panel system on the roof.

At a glance

What they do: Full-service design studio offering planning, project development, architecture, interior design and graphic design

Company headquarters: New Orleans

Top executive: Gerald W. Billes

Total employees: 24

Total employees in Louisiana: 24

Year founded: 2003

Market area: Gulf Coast, United States

Web: billesarchitecture.com

10 Bruce Foods

Founded in 1928 in New Iberia, Bruce Foods has been manufacturing original Cajun and Tex Mex food products for more than 80 years—long before these spicy cuisines were introduced to the rest of the world. The company's Mexican food plant in El Paso, Texas, was founded in 1931 and pioneered the first canned Mexican foods. Along the corridor, the company's Louisiana brand hot sauce, Cajun Injector products and Bruce's Yams are household names. But Bruce products are distributed throughout the U.S. and in more than 100 countries and are carried by most of the top retail grocery chains worldwide. The company claims it sells more than 35% of all canned yams sold during the Thanksgiving holidays, equaling millions of cans. Now that's what we call giving the corridor a good name.

At a glance

What they do: Food manufacturer, distributor and exporter

Company headquarters: New Iberia

Top executive: J.S. "Si" Brown

Total employees: 1,200

Total employees in Louisiana: 600

Year founded: 1928

Market area: Worldwide

Web: brucefoods.com

11 Canal Barge Company, Inc.

Canal Barge operates a fleet of 32 towboats and more than 800 barges throughout the U.S. Inland Waterways System, moving petroleum and petrochemicals, dry bulk commodities and specialized project cargos, both domestically and internationally. The company also operates a bulk liquid storage terminal and a towing and fleetling service on the Illinois Waterway. In 2009, the company debuted on the Inc. 500/5000 list of fastest growing private companies at No. 3,404, with \$275.8 million in revenue and a 2005-2008 growth rate of 73.2%.

At a glance

What they do: Marine transport

Company headquarters: New Orleans

Top executive: H. Merritt Lane III

Total employees: 571

Total employees in Louisiana: 199

Year founded: 1933

Market area: U.S. Inland Waterways System

Web: canalbarge.com

12 Celtic Media Centre

Louisiana's first full-service, state-of-the-art movie production studio facility, Celtic is a key player and investor in Louisiana's growing film industry. It has taken a leading role in incubating and growing businesses and individuals catering to the region's creative industries, from partnering with a local real estate company to relocate film crew into homes in the Baton Rouge area to assisting indigenous filmmakers with tax credits. A venture of The Celtic Group, this company has dedicated itself to establishing a permanent, successful and locally based entertainment industry on the corridor.

At a glance

What they do: Motion picture production studio facility

Company headquarters: Baton Rouge

Top executive: Michael O'Connor

Total employees: 8

Total employees in Louisiana: 8

Year founded: 2006

Market area: Worldwide

Web: thecelticgroup.com

13 C.H. Fenstermaker & Associates

This multidisciplinary company provides engineering, surveying and mapping, environmental consulting, and advanced technologies for a variety of markets, including transportation, energy, natural resources and ports and waterways, in federal, state and municipal capacities. It's background in coastal engineering and advanced technologies could make it a key player in the backbone of a future water management industry in south Louisiana.

At a glance

What they do: Engineering, surveying & mapping, environmental consulting, advanced technologies

Company headquarters: Lafayette

Top executives: Greg Palmer, Gerry Duzynski, Gordon Nelson, Krista Goodin

Total employees: 289

Total employees in Louisiana: 278

Year founded: 1950

Market area: Louisiana, Texas

Web: fenstermaker.com

14 Community Coffee Co.

What would morning in south Louisiana be without Community Coffee? The flavor, the fragrance—even the familiar red package—are an integral part of the culture of countless kitchens, offices and families on the corridor. We also tip our hat to the company's longtime efforts to touch the community, particularly by aiding schools. Its popular Community Cash for Schools program is now in its 21st year.

At a glance

What they do: Family-owned importer, roaster and distributor of premium, specialty coffee

Company headquarters: Baton Rouge

Top executive: Matt Saurage

Total employees: 1,102

Total employees in Louisiana: 767

Year founded: 1919

Market area: Gulf South and Southeast

Web: communitycoffee.com

15 Dynamic Industries, Inc.

One of the corridor's largest headquarters firms, Dynamic Industries employs more than 1,400 Louisianans in its operations as one of the leading fabrication and related field services companies serving the energy industry. It operates facilities in Lake Charles, New Iberia and Harvey and has employees working at client sites worldwide, with a client list that includes the giants of the oil production industry. For decades, companies like Chevron, BP and ConocoPhillips have depended on Dynamic Industries to help them construct and maintain offshore platforms around the world—and to do it safely.

At a glance

What they do: Fabrication, maintenance and construction services for the energy industry; marine services; pipe, valve & fittings and steel product distribution; offshore and onshore equipment rental; support and emergency services

Company headquarters: Lafayette

Top executive: Michael Moreno

Total employees: 1,614

Total employees in Louisiana: 1,450

Year founded: 1998

Market area: Worldwide

Web: dynamicind.com

16 Edgen Murray II

Another of the corridor's key suppliers of materials and services to the energy industry, Edgen Murray II has emerged as a major player in the world steel products market, thanks to an explosive growth that has been fueled by smart acquisitions and sharp increases in the global demand for products it is consistently able to deliver. Revenues topped \$1.2 billion in 2008, a 37% increase from \$918 million in 2007, and it has 25 locations worldwide with more than 2,700 customers. The growth landed the company at No. 18 on Inc. magazine's 2008 list of fastest-growing private firms in the nation.

At a glance

What they do: Distribute high-performance steel and alloy products for use in energy infrastructures and other industrial markets

Company headquarters:

Top executives: Dan O'Leary, David Laxton

Total employees: 450

Total employees in Louisiana: 90

Year founded: 1996

Market area: Worldwide

Web: edgenmurray.com

17 Emeril's Homebase

The home office for the numerous restaurant and food enterprises of Chef Emeril Lagasse, another of the corridor's best known brands.

At a glance

What they do: Houses Emeril's restaurant operations, as well as cookbook and recipe development and testing, the emerils.com Web site and product shipping, and a store front for Emeril's signature products

Company headquarters: New Orleans

Top executive: Emeril Lagasse

Total employees: 850

Total employees in Louisiana: N/A

Year founded: 1990

Market area: Worldwide

Web: emerils.com

18 Ferrara Fire Apparatus

From its 300,000-square-foot factory in Holden, Ferrara offers a full line of fire trucks and emergency vehicles, including the Inferno, Igniter, Ember and Intruder custom chassis; pumpers; tenders; wildland; rescues; and aerial ladders and platforms. Ferrara also builds specialty fire apparatus, such as law enforcement command vehicles, bomb squad trucks and a line of vehicles built especially for refineries and chemical plants. The company is both a major innovator in its industry and an ambassador for the corridor, supplying its equipment to fire departments and cities around the country, including the Fire Department of New York City, and around the world.

At a glance

What they do: Manufacture heavy duty, custom fire apparatus

Company headquarters: Holden

Top executive: Chris Ferrara

Total employees: 400

Total employees in Louisiana: 400

Year founded: 1982

Market area: Worldwide

Web: ferrarafire.com

19 Florida Marine Transporters

From Pittsburgh, Penn., to Lake Michigan to the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway, FMT uses an industry-standard-setting fleet of barges and towboats to move liquid cargoes such as gasoline and jet fuel all over the inland waterways of the U.S.

At a glance

What they do: Marine transportation company currently moving liquid cargoes through out the inland waterways of the United States

Company headquarters: Mandeville

Top executives: Dennis A. Pasentine, Dennis J. Pasentine, John D. Roberts

Total employees: 99

Total employees in Louisiana: 50

Year founded: 1998

Market area: Gulf Intracoastal Waterway, Mississippi River, Great Lakes, Midwest, Southern U.S.

Web: fmt.flmarine.net

20 General Informatics

Though it is less than 10 years old, General Informatics has rolled up an impressive list of honors and awards—including a spot on the 2009 Inc. 500|5000 list for fastest-growing private firms—and today works as the functional IT department for more than 30 clients, supporting, managing and implementing their IT needs. It pioneered the model of pay-for-performance in IT outsourcing, allowing customers to better predict and manage their IT budgets. CEO Mohit Vij is the Greater Baton Rouge Business Report's 2010 Young Businessperson of the Year.

At a glance

What they do: IT engineering and services

Company headquarters: Baton Rouge

Top executive: Mohit Vij

Total employees: 28

Total employees in Louisiana: 28

Year founded: 2001

Market area: Louisiana and Mississippi

Web: geninf.com

21 Laitram, LLC

Founded by J.M. Lapeyre to develop and commercialize his invention of the automatic shrimp peeler, Laitram has grown to employ more than 1,400 people in four operating divisions: Intralox LLC is a maker of modular plastic belting for conveyors that has 60,000 customers around the world and six new product development teams working in New Orleans; Laitram Machinery Inc. continues to be a leading innovator in seafood processing equipment; Lapeyre Stair Inc. designs and makes metal stairs and work platforms for industry; and Industrial Microwave Systems LLC is a developer of industrial microwave applications based in North Carolina's Research Triangle Park. Lapeyre himself was issued more than 130 U.S. patents and more than 100 foreign patents that have led to thousands of jobs around the world, and Laitram continues to generate more than a dozen U.S. patents a year.

At a glance

What they do: Design and manufacture seafood processing equipment; conveyor belts; metal stair and platform systems; and microwave systems used for heating and drying in manufacturing

Company headquarters: Harahan

Top executive: Jay Lapeyre

Total employees: 1,400

Total employees in Louisiana: 890

Year founded: 1949

Market area: Worldwide

Web: laitrammachinery.com

22 LEEVAC Industries

LEEVAC is a leading shipbuilding and ship repair operation providing "world-class vessels for all oceans"—and a key employer and key corporate citizen in the Jefferson Davis Parish community.

At a glance

What they do: Shipbuilding and ship repair

Company headquarters: Jennings

Top executives: Christian Vaccari, Tom Church, Troy Skelton

Total employees: 220

Total employees in Louisiana: 220

Year founded: 1965

Market area: Gulf of Mexico and international waters

Web: leevac.com

23 Mardi Gras World (Blaine Kern Studios)

In the city that made Mardi Gras famous, no name is more closely associated with Mardi Gras than Kern.

It was some 60 years ago that the head of a New Orleans Carnival krewe asked a young sign painter named Blaine Kern to design a parade float. From that first foray into the accoutrements of celebratory excess, Kern went on to build an impressive career.

Today, Blaine Kern Studios (now known as Mardi Gras World) is a celebration-organizing powerhouse with a reputation that crosses continents and has the Kern family rubbing elbows with the world's biggest names in fun. The company long ago began expanding outward from its core focus on Mardi Gras in New Orleans and now stages major parades and events around the world.

Many of the events use props modeled after the floats displayed in Mardi Gras World, the Kern family's massive Carnival exhibit and event center that has locations on both sides of the Mississippi River in New Orleans. The larger-than-life characters from Greek mythology that populate the spectacular Mardi Gras floats have become familiar to parade-goers in far parts of the globe. And Blaine Kern's company has grown into a sprawling enterprise that also opened careers for his three sons, Barry, Blaine Jr. and Brian, all of whom work in the business.

"Right now we're working on floats in London," says company CEO Barry Kern. "We're working on major events in Singapore and Japan for Universal Studios, in Montreal for the jazz festival there, and in South Africa for events tied to the World Cup."

The business employs people ranging from hundreds to thousands, depending on the demands of various events, at a time when much of the world is still recovering from economic slowdown. Kern says it's hard to believe that a mere five years ago the company was headed for the best year, and the biggest disruption, in its history.

"We were on line to do the most events and have the most visitors ever to Mardi Gras World," he says. Then came August 2005.

For every resident of New Orleans, Hurricane Katrina and the resulting flood delivered a staggering blow.

But for the city's "first family" of Mardi Gras, the punch carried an added cost. The disaster suddenly called into question the future of the Carnival organizations that annually spend big bucks with Blaine Kern Studios for floats, decorations and the staging of elaborate balls. Carnival leaders and their families were hurting, and people who would ordinarily have been gearing up for Carnival season were instead focused on replacing their homes.

The Kern family realized, instinctively, that staging Mardi Gras 2006 would be crucial. Fat Tuesday would fall exactly six months after Katrina hit New Orleans. Blaine Kern Sr. and his sons flew into high gear.

"We got our people back to work and started telling other people that there was going to be a Mardi Gras," Barry Kern says. "We didn't necessarily believe it ourselves at first, but we just knew it had to happen."

In their quest to build support for Mardi Gras, the family received help from afar. They were busy with projects at Walt Disney World and other Florida theme parks, where they stage weekly parades and concerts for Universal Studios during Carnival season. Universal Studios and another Kern partner, alcoholic beverage giant Diageo, asked what they could do to help.

"I said I needed them to pre-pay me for my work because I needed the revenue to keep everything else going until we could get people thinking about Mardi Gras again," Kern says. Both companies stepped up.

Their support enabled Blaine Kern Studios to keep things moving in New Orleans. "I had my own concerns about the overall viability of building floats in New Orleans, but had we not staged that first Mardi Gras, a lot of those krewes would not have come back the next year," Kern says.

Kern says it has been gratifying to see how Mardi Gras in New Orleans has rebounded in recent years. But for sheer excitement, nothing tops the 2010 parade that occurred just ahead of Mardi Gras.

"This year, the highlight for all of us was the Saints winning the Super Bowl, and the parade we produced for the Saints was special, even for me," he says.

Kern says his dad was delighted to be a part of the historic event and, at age 82, the elder Kern remains "very involved" in the company. "He still has an idea a second—not a minute, but a second. He has an incredible imagination and a great vision." —Story by Kathy Finn

At a glance

What they do: World's leading maker of floats, sculptures and props

Company headquarters: New Orleans

Top executive: Barry Kern

Total employees: 25

Total employees in Louisiana: 25

Year founded: 1947

Market area: Worldwide

Web: mardigrasworld.com

24 Marucci Sports

Starting in 2003 with a bat designed by LSU's head athletic trainer Jack Marucci, this company has already established itself as one of the most powerful brands in baseball. Hundreds of Major Leaguers now trust a bat made by Marucci when they step into the box, from two-time National League MVP Albert Pujols to 18 of the players in the 2009 World Series. This year, the company launched a high-tech, aluminum bat targeting the massive youth baseball market, which represents a large share of the 2 million aluminum bats sold each year in the U.S. Company officials envision building a business deeply rooted in the LSU and Baton Rouge communities—a brand that is to Louisiana what Nike is to Oregon.

At a glance

What they do: Make wooden bats for Major League Baseball players and aluminum bats for the youth baseball market

Company headquarters: Baton Rouge

Top executive: Reed Dickens

Total employees: 25

Total employees in Louisiana: 20

Year founded: 2003

Market area: Nationwide

Web: maruccisports.com

25 McIlhenny Co.

The producer of the corridor's best known brand, Tabasco, is also the oldest company on our list.

At a glance

What they do: Food manufacturer

Company headquarters: Avery Island

Top executive: Paul McIlhenny

Total employees: 200

Total employees in Louisiana: 186

Year founded: 1868

Market area: Worldwide

Web: tabasco.com

26 Naked Pizza

This innovative startup that had the gumption to imagine healthy pizza has garnered venture capital funding from the likes of Mark Cuban and Robert Kraft.

At a glance

What they do: Sell nutritional pizza—and franchises to do the same

Company headquarters: New Orleans

Top local executives: Jeff Leach, Randy Crochet, Brock Fillinger, Robbie Vitrano

Total employees: 35

Total employees in Louisiana: 35

Year founded: 2006

Market area: International

Web: nakedpizza.biz

27 Neill Corp.

This family-owned, Hammond-based beauty product and salon company has endorsed the principle that its business is not only about looking beautiful, but also about living beautifully, so it has also made sustainability a major corporate value. In addition to distributing Aveda products, Neill operates 13 salons in south Louisiana and has branched out into salon and spa technology, software development, education, retail planning and design.

At a glance

What they do: Distribute Aveda products; salon and spa industry services

Company headquarters: Hammond

Top executives: Edwin H. Neill III and Debra Neill-Baker

Total employees: 531

Total employees in Louisiana: 467

Year founded: 1968

Market area: Louisiana, Texas, Mississippi, Tennessee, Alabama, Oklahoma, Arkansas and Mexico

Web: neill.net

28 New Orleans Saints

Super Bowl XLIV Champions.

At a glance

What they do: Professional football

Company headquarters: Metairie

Top executive: Tom Benson

Total employees: 125

Total employees in Louisiana: 125

Year founded: 1967

Market area: Worldwide

Web: neworleanssaints.com

29 Ochsner Health System

Ochsner Health System is a nonprofit, academic, multispecialty, health care delivery system dedicated to patient care, research and education. The system includes seven hospitals and more than 35 health centers located throughout southeast Louisiana. Ochsner employs more than 750 physicians in more than 90 medical specialties and subspecialties, and its 11,000 employees make it one of the corridor's largest employers. Just as significantly, Ochsner is a national leader in medical research with more than 300 ongoing research trials and 200 annual publications in medical literature. The system was also ranked one of the "Best Places to Work" by New Orleans CityBusiness in 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008, and was ranked as "Best" Hospital by U.S. News and World Report in Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) in 2007 and as one of the 50 "Best Hospitals in America" in Heart & Heart Surgery, Urology and ENT in 2009.

At a glance

What they do: Health care

Company headquarters: New Orleans

Top executive: Patrick Quinlan, M.D.

Total employees: 11,000

Total employees in Louisiana: 11,000

Year founded: 1941

Market area: Southeast Louisiana, southwest Mississippi

Web: ochsner.org

30 Omega Natchiq

Another critical support business for the oil and gas industry, Omega Natchiq has extensive capabilities in fabrication of production platforms, production operations and maintenance.

At a glance

What they do: Full-service provider for the global energy, refining, chemical, power, utility, and manufacturing industries

Company headquarters: New Iberia

Top executive: Gary Buchanan

Total employees: 500

Total employees in Louisiana: 475

Year founded: 1998

Market area: Gulf Coast

Web: N/A

31 OTTO CANDIES

Another key link in south Louisiana's support network for the offshore oil industry, OTTO CANDIES was the first independent contractor to use ocean-going barges for deep-sea supply. Eliminating the need for large, bulky ships during transport reduced supply costs. CANDIES vessels were also the first to transport a complete oil production package from Houston to the North Sea, and, when NASA needed to ship its enormous Saturn V rocket to Cape Kennedy, it turned to CANDIES, a family-owned and operated business based in St. Charles Parish.

At a glance

What they do: Marine transportation and towing

Company headquarters: Des Allemands

Top executives: Several members of the Candies family lead the company

Total employees: 250

Total employees in Louisiana: 250

Year founded: 1942

Market area: Worldwide

Web: ottocandies.com

32 Pixel Magic

Last summer, Louisiana Immersive Technologies Enterprise CEO Henry Florsheim met the producer of the Disney film *Secretariat* while he was in Lafayette filming. Florsheim offered to temporarily house the movie's edit team at LITE. The producer took him up on the offer and also introduced Florsheim to a friend of his who worked for a visual effects company in California. That friend was Ray McIntyre Jr., the vice president and VFX supervisor for Pixel Magic.

"We realized Pixel Magic had been looking for their first location outside of California, and when we met and started talking about LITE's mission and the technology infrastructure we had here, it became clear immediately that it was going to be a really good fit," says Florsheim. Pixel Magic, represented by McIntyre Jr. and Vice President and General Manager Ray Scalice, announced their intent to open a studio at LITE in November 2009 moved into their new space in January.

McIntyre Jr. says the technical capabilities of LITE and the state's extensive tax credits for the film industry are why Pixel Magic is in Lafayette today. "In the last five years or so, what's really changed in our business is the tax credits offered," he says. "Until we came to Lafayette, I was losing jobs and work to companies that were in Canada or Australia or states where they could offer the credit. That was a big change for the business in general and so Pixel Magic had to become part of that."

LITE was an attractive solution because of its all-inclusive technical capabilities, like server access, high-speed data transfer and on-site support. "It just puts us in a position to get to work sooner and generate

income sooner than if I had to do all that myself," explains McIntyre Jr.

The Canada native spends about two weeks out of every month in the Lafayette office, training mostly UL Lafayette graduates in visual effects work through a Louisiana FastStart program, which covers screening and training costs for new companies. The program allowed them to immediately hire several people from the Lafayette area to work on Secretariat, and McIntyre Jr. hopes to eventually have a Rolodex of locals he can call on for work.

Initially, Pixel Magic expected to create 40 jobs in three years through FastStart, but this spring, when the company entered the market for converting standard movies into 3D, it announced plans to hire 100 artists for its offices at LITE.

The company worked on two films out in theaters now, *She's Out of My League* and *Hot Tub Time Machine*, and is currently working on Warner Bros.' *Jonah Hex*, due out this summer. While the term "visual effects" probably brings to mind action scenes like those in *300* or HBO's new series, *The Pacific*, both listed on Pixel's resume, McIntyre Jr. says, "There's very few movies that have no visual effects at all." Pixel can do anything from removing a wire from a scene to changing the colors of a landscape like in 2008's *Marley & Me*. "There were hundreds of shots done in there because we didn't shoot at the right time of year to either have snow on the ground or to have the fall colors in the trees, so they were manufactured, and hopefully when people watch the movie they never had any idea there was anything done," says McIntyre Jr.

The same is true for *Secretariat*. All of the horse racing footage was shot at Evangeline Downs in Opelousas, but stadium footage was shot in Kentucky, so Pixel Magic has to put the two elements together.

Pixel Magic is the first tenant in LITE's Accelerator program, a business incubator that brings in companies for one year of free rent, with funding help from Lafayette Economic Development Authority.

"Our team has been working with them to build out a custom solution so they can do the same type of work here that they do in California," explains Florsheim. Pixel Magic is expected to fulfill its part of the deal by being a sort of spokescompany for the state's tax credits, as well as being instrumental in starting a Louisiana chapter of the Visual Effects Society to ensure that Louisiana stays on the map for the film industry.

"Part of our responsibility to the state and Lafayette is to help them bring more business," says McIntyre Jr. "The intent is to try and get more movies to come here for production and to stay here for post-production if the services are here."—Story by Erin Z. Bass

At a glance

What they do: Provide a wide range of visual effects and 3D animation services for feature film and television clients

Company headquarters: Los Angeles

Corridor location: Lafayette

Top local executive: Ray McIntyre Jr.

Total employees: 40

Total employees in Louisiana: 12

Year founded: 1985

Market area: Primarily Southern California

Web: pixelmagicfx.com

33 The Receivables Exchange

The world's first online marketplace for real-time trading of accounts receivable, helping companies to increase their liquidity and drive down their cost of capital on their terms.

At a glance

What they do: Online marketplace for accounts receivable

Company headquarters: New Orleans

Top executive: Nic Perkin

Total employees: 70

Total employees in Louisiana: 60

Year founded: 2007

Market area: National

Web: receivablesXchange.com

34 Reily Foods Co.

Based in New Orleans, Reily is the maker of Luzianne tea, CDM coffee, Blue Plate mayonnaise and other authentic Southern foods and beverages.

At a glance

What they do: Marketer of authentic Southern foods and beverages, with focus on tea (Luzianne), coffee, mayonnaise, baking and chili

Company headquarters: New Orleans

Top executive: David Darragh

Total employees: 400

Total employees in Louisiana: 100

Year founded: 1902

Market area: National

Web: luzianne.com

35 Schumacher Group

Founded by William "Kip" Schumacher 15 years ago, Schumacher Group is now the third-largest emergency medicine staffing and management company in the country. The company began in rural Louisiana and has grown by reputation, without mergers or acquisitions: What began as a business for

staffing and management of rural, community hospital emergency departments continues to grow. The company was ranked No. 3 on Acadiana's Top 50 by The Independent in 2009 with \$370 million in 2008 revenues, and Kip Schumacher was named Acadiana's 2010 Entrepreneur of the Year. Schumacher Group also supports numerous nonprofit and community events and organizations in the Lafayette area.

At a glance

What they do: Provide staffing and management to emergency rooms and hospitals

Company headquarters: Lafayette

Top executive: William "Kip" Schumacher, M.D.

Total employees: 730

Total employees in Louisiana: 320

Year founded: 1994

Market area: Serves more than 160 hospital partners in 19 states

Web: schumachergroup.com

36 Smoothie King

The first franchised smoothie bar/health food store business in the U.S. currently has more than 550 units operating in 32 states and more than 60 international locations in Seoul, Korea. The Covington company says it has its eyes on expanding into Egypt, Turkey and the Cayman Islands next.

At a glance

What they do: Sell nutritional fruit- and function-based, fresh-blended smoothies; franchising

Company headquarters: Covington

Top executives: Steve & Cindy Kuhnau

Total employees: 55

Total employees in Louisiana: 48

Year founded: 1973

Market area: 32 states and South Korea

Web: smoothieking.com

37 Stine Lumber

A retailer providing building materials and other home improvement goods to both the do-it-yourself and contractor markets, Stine Lumber has grown from a single store in Sulphur in the early '70s to more than a dozen stores today. Stine is among the top 100 building materials dealers in the U.S., and fourth in sales among 6,000 Ace retailers worldwide. But Stine is also the quintessential family business, led by six brothers and dedicated to supporting the communities in which it operates. The brothers have served in governmental roles at various levels, and the company supports universities, hospitals, community foundations, chamber boards and other nonprofit organizations with both money and time.

At a glance

What they do: Sell home improvement products—retail and contractor

Company headquarters: Sulphur

Top executive: Dennis Stine

Total employees: 713

Total employees in Louisiana: 658

Year founded: 1954

Market area: Western and central Louisiana, I-10 corridor, and Natchez, Miss.

Web: stinelumber.com

38 Stirling Properties

Reporting more than a half billion dollars in combined sales in 2009, Stirling has a portfolio with 91 million square feet of commercial properties and land for sale or lease, 11.5 million square feet of managed properties, and more than \$275 million in properties under development. The company ranked 20th nationwide in Commercial Property News' list of Most Powerful Brokerage Firms for 2009. One of the largest real estate firms in the Gulf South, Stirling's list of credits includes The Premier Centre in Mandeville, Northpark I and II in Covington, Hammond Square in Hammond, University Club Plantation in Baton Rouge and the Stirling Center retail developments located across the corridor.

At a glance

What they do: Real estate firm offering comprehensive services in development; commercial brokerage; property and asset management; investment sales; property owner and tenant representation; and residential

Company headquarters: Covington

Top executive: Marty Mayer

Total employees: 342

Total employees in Louisiana: 340

Year founded: 1976

Market area: Gulf South

Web: stirlingprop.com

39 Stuller

Lafayette-based Stuller employs 1,200 people in Louisiana and owns 10 operations located on three continents, providing a wide range of products and services for jewelry professionals, from jewelry to mountings, diamonds, metals, tools and supplies.

At a glance